

Telling Our Story

what's up, DOC!



"Now I can go to and from work on my own. I can travel to and from my shop for supplies," said Abdul Malik, a wheelchair-bound shopkeeper.

In Arghandab, A Road More Traveled

"The road was in terrible condition and I couldn't get to the bazaar without falling over," recalls Abdul Malik. Wheelchair-bound from an insurgent bomb attack four years ago, until recently, Malik found it hard to make his way from home to the tiny shop he rents in Arghandab in Afghanistan's southern province of Kandahar.

He relied on friends and neighbors to negotiate the harrowing daily commute, but even their help proved inadequate to the challenges of the

uneven, potholed road. The community sought action from the authorities, and the Kandahar municipal government partnered with USAID to repair the road. The project also aimed to improve access to local schools, mosques and residential areas. It took more than 600 local skilled and unskilled laborers to lay gravel and repair 20 kilometers of roads.

Abdul Malik's life changed dramatically. He no longer needs an escort, and he is more mobile than ever before. "Now, I can go to and from work on my own. I

Tip of the Week

Communicators' Workshop - Feb 5th!

All implementing partners have been invited to send one participant to meet with the DOC office next Tuesday.



Make sure your project is represented!

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don't need anyone to push me," he says. "I also have the freedom to travel far from my shop to buy supplies. I could not do this before."

He adds that the road project has been a boon to many and in many different ways. "Before, there were many jobless youngsters and they would sit in front of my shop and bother me and my customers. When the project started, all of them were hired as laborers. Now they spend their earnings in my store."

Also in this edition...



Kandahar Municipality Meets the Needs of its People



'Problem' Village Unites



Better Than Cash!

Kandahar Municipality Meets the Needs of its People

Kandahar's residents say their lives have been transformed since the installation of the information service desk in May 2012. Gul Ahmad, who lives in Kandahar City, says, "Before, when I visited the municipal offices, I didn't know how to process my application and where to submit it. Once, I came to the municipality and submitted an application to register house ownership, and I was told to come in after one week. When I returned, my application was lost. Now, it is very easy to access each particular department. One day I submitted my request to the information service desk, and received the response as soon as the following day."

Kandahar, the largest municipality in southern Afghanistan, is now better able to meet the needs of its residents, thanks to this information-service desk established by USAID. The desk officers respond to requests for assistance from people in Kandahar's 10 districts in a timely and systematic way. They receive 60 to 100 such requests a day, and are responsible for delivering the query to the appropriate municipal department. Customized Microsoft Excel software, which records the applicant's tazkeera or identity card number, automates the process of receiving and processing requests.



The people of Kandahar are taking advantage of the new municipal information service desk.



A village in southeastern Afghanistan repairs its canals and reservoirs in defiance of insurgents

'Problem' Village Unites

Zamarai Kot is locally dubbed 'Mushkil', the Dari word for problem, and the village in Paktika province in southeastern Afghanistan had damaged irrigation infrastructure which meant low crop yield, and the area was beset by insurgent activity.

Local Afghan officials sought to help villagers rebuild their reservoir and nine kilometers of canals with support from the local authorities and USAID but insurgents intervened. They demanded there be no collaboration with the Afghan government. "They threatened to kidnap and torture us if we worked on the project," says Haji Mohammed Akber, recalling the difficult decision his village faced.

"We realized that if we reconstructed the intake and irrigation canals, it would protect us from floods and greatly improve the

economy of our community," he declared, "but to do so would defy the insurgents' diktat and would be a break with the past.

Zamarai Kot decided to stand united against the insurgents, with more than 500 villagers joining 20 Afghan government representatives, including the Provincial Governor, at the project's official launch. Haji Akber says it has been a lesson in strength through solidarity. "Implementing this project has awakened in us the desire to work to improve our country. It has taught us that if we work together we really can make a difference."

facebook focus



Twenty-six midwives recently were graduated from the USAID-supported Community Midwifery Education program in Jawzjan. Read more >> <http://goo.gl/kjm8i>

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Postcards from Afghanistan!

Dear Grandma,

Greetings from Kabul. It is a wonderful place, full of happy and peaceful people. However, now I truly understand why Fido takes off running every time you open the door and doesn't want to come back for days!

Remember when you asked what I'm doing over here, well... our team works on the **Land Reform in Afghanistan** project, which means we are working to help Afghans have the right to formal ownership of land and help protect their land rights. For Afghans, this leads to a greater feeling of safety and security, and encourages them to invest into their own property. For business owners, it leads to a reduction in corruption and land disputes, leading to greater confidence and economic growth. For government, it means a better understanding of the communities they service and encourages them to provide the services people need. Land Reform in Afghanistan is more than just about land, it's about building a better and more stable Afghanistan for all Afghans. Worth working for!

Wish you were here!

Jim

"What a privilege! The sound of the Afghan traditional instruments is absolutely remarkable. The concert was so touching and inspiring. A truly Afghan cultural experience, with a full house and entire families and young Afghans enjoying the music.

The Third Annual Winter Music Academy held a Gala Concert on January 30th. The young musicians from ANIM - Afghan National Institute of Music - performed an incredible, moving concert before they depart for the U.S. The historic first U.S. Tour by the ANIM includes concerts at The Kennedy Center (Feb 7), Carnegie Hall (Feb 12) & New England Conservatory (Feb 13 & 14).

Spread the word! Go see and support them!"

Hector R. Cerpa

Photo of the Week



Better Than Cash!

Today, 2.5 billion adults — more than a third of the world's population — are excluded from the formal financial sector. This is most acute in the developing world where approximately 80 percent of poor people are excluded. As a result, most poor households have no option but to subsist almost entirely in an informal, cash-only economy, making it difficult for them to access financial services like bank accounts to save for the future, build assets or get credit. Electronic payments can create lasting benefits for people by creating opportunities to access formal financial services and begin to develop assets and save for the future.

The Afghan government recently announced that it has joined the **'Better Than Cash Alliance'**. This association works with governments, the development community and the private sector to adopt the use of electronic payments and provide resources to those who commit to make the transition.

"We recognize the value of accelerating the use of safe electronic payments as a solution for promoting financial inclusion, increasing transparency and creating a more secure world for women and their families," said Mohammed Aqah, Director General of Treasury, Ministry of Finance in Afghanistan.

Currently in Afghanistan, the Ministry of Finance is partnering with the Ministry of Education and the Association of Mobile Money Operators on an innovative teacher salary payment pilot that aims to increase the number of bank accounts and electronic salary payments. The government is also conducting a mobile/electronic



utility payment pilot in Kabul targeting 100,000 electricity customers.

"There are real benefits for governments of increased transparency, accountability and security as well as increased efficiency and cost reduction in the long-term. But perhaps the greatest benefit goes to those citizens for whom reduced costs in time and money make a big difference, to those for whom security is paramount and to those who can use electronic payments to start to save and take advantage of economic opportunities," said Dr. Ruth Goodwin-Groen managing director of the Better Than Cash Alliance.

Afghanistan joins the governments of Colombia, Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines, all of whom have committed to digitize payments to people living in poverty, thereby becoming eligible members for technical and financial support from the Better Than Cash Alliance. This is an initiative founded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Citi, Ford Foundation, Omidyar Network, U.N. Capital Development Fund, Visa Inc, and USAID.



USAID/Afghanistan Mission Director, Dr Ken Yamashita, speaking at the Water Resources Development & Management conference.

Third National Water Conference

Speaking at this yesterday's third annual Water Resources Development and Management in Kabul on January 29, President Karzai thanked the international community for their assistance to Afghanistan's water and energy sector. He also emphasized that this effort will only succeed if Afghans now take the lead. The conference also presented an opportunity for USAID Mission Director Ken Yamashita to highlight recent developments in the water sector; and underscore USG support for a multi-donor approach to future assistance.